

The Fall 577

Chapter 577: Corruption

Zac mutely looked at the revised line in his status screen for a few seconds. There was only one way to interpret the addition even though it didn't exactly match the intelligence he had gathered so far. His lava bath had purified his constitution to the point that his previously unknown Bloodline could be listed, even if it hadn't completely awakened yet.

And he had to admit that it sounded pretty damn powerful.

Zac almost ate his [Bloodline Marrow] then and there in hopes to properly awaken it, but he barely managed to restrain the impulse. First of all, his body was in a completely drained state after using the [Berserking Pill] even if the lava bath had managed to expel most of the toxins. Eating a treasure in this condition was essentially the same as flushing them down the toilet.

But more importantly, the fact that the status screen termed his bloodline 'corrupted' gave him pause.

He had never heard of something like this before. Zac had bought a few general missives about bloodlines after realizing he might have one, but they didn't cover anything like this. The unawakened line was just as described, but the mention of corruption had never been brought up at all.

The most basic way to explain a bloodline was to call it a genetic mutation brought on by an extremely powerful ancestor. After reaching a certain stage their bodies became vessels of their cultivation path, fundamentally affecting their genetics. The body of someone walking the path of fire would essentially turn into a being whose flesh could turn into flames at will. Even their convictions and beliefs were added into the bloodlines.

The rules of what was required to pass on a bloodline weren't exactly clear, but the general consensus was that one needed to reach middle C-Grade at the least for one's body to transform to the point that their cultivation path could be passed on. However, this actually happening was still extremely rare, which meant that there most likely were more requirements. Some posited that there was a requirement of affinity and understanding of the Dao, whereas others believed that great mental strength was required.

In either case, one needed to be beyond the norm for a bloodline to be born. It was also generally believed that the more powerful a cultivator became, the greater a bloodline they would leave behind. A C-Grade Monarch's bloodline would probably be the lowest rung, to the point that it disappeared after a few short generations. Only the most powerful beings could leave behind bloodlines that could stay on generation after generation.

The effect of bloodlines was extremely varied as well, ranging from giving huge boosts to controlling specific Daos or calling upon the strength of your body, whereas others were essentially useless. Some might even become detrimental to the descendants if the ancestor practiced some cruel and unorthodox path.

Bloodlines started unawakened, but they could be awakened through either cultivating a Body Tempering Manual or some specific Bloodline Manual. Of course, some treasures could get the job done as well, such as the [Bloodline Marrow]. The average effect of the first awakening was generally set at

around 15 to 25% provided the bloodline matched your path, and this boost could be anything from cultivation speed to power output in battle.

That meant that a mortal with a combat-oriented bloodline was almost equal to a cultivator without one, as one got a boost from their heritage while the other got a similar boost from their Cultivation Manual. Of course, having both would provide multiplicative boosts, which was the situation most cultivators longed for. Higher-quality bloodlines could even provide unique skills, and Zac considered the devouring ability of [Void Heart] to belong to that category, even though he couldn't control it yet.

The line that said Corrupted on his status screen was actually the place that should display the rarity of the bloodline. Bloodlines shared the same rarity as classes, going from Common to Epic. Zac guessed there were even greater bloodlines as well, though that wasn't something that a cheap missive in the Zecia sector would either cover or confirm.

Bloodline rarity was also fixed according to the manuals, and not something that either training or treasures could impact. A higher rarity generally meant a more powerful bloodline that could be awakened more times. Of course, a higher-rarity bloodline was a lot harder to improve as well, just like how it went with classes. Furthermore, the number of awakenings you could perform depended on your bloodline's rarity to a large degree, but it could still be influenced by hard work and opportunities.

But what did corrupted mean? The line felt extremely ominous, to the point that Zac almost felt he was beset with an affliction rather than an opportunity. Nothing in the information missive had prepared him for that line, and he wasn't sure whether.

But Zac eventually decided to simply keep going. There were multiple possible explanations of why his bloodline was considered corrupted, with the most likely one being that it was affected by his Technocrat heritage. Perhaps the System immediately considered his body corrupted from that as a basis.

He had to admit there being a possibility of his condition being a result of his mother's experiments as well. But even if that was the case, it still shouldn't be something detrimental. Leandra should have been trying to make a powerful bloodline or modify an existing one to suit her needs better, which should mean that it wasn't a detrimental constitution.

What was important was that it was useful and provided benefits, and Zac already felt that it was doing just that. For now, he only had only one Hidden Node doing some work, but Zac believed it might prove extremely useful in the future. He still remembered the vision of that mysterious man passing by a sun, stealing its essence for his own cultivation.

That was exactly what he needed; an alternative method of cultivation that would help him move forward. Reaching the higher grades of Cultivation as a mortal was already akin to defying the heavens, he was also doing it with multiple high-rarity classes. Gaining the ability to break past bottlenecks might prove even more helpful than yet another power boost.

Zac could only put the matter aside for now, and he instead turned his attention to the state of his body. The tempering process had hurt to the point that he almost went insane, but it hadn't actually wounded him. The pain that he felt just a minute ago almost felt like a dream, and even the wounds from the

battle with the golem had improved considerably. He still felt too tired to move at the moment, so he simply scrambled up to a sitting position for now.

It was a huge wake-up call for Zac to see the amount of impurities he had expelled during the tempering. He had thought himself almost in perfect condition based on looking at his interiors with his spiritual sight, but there was actually so much gunk left behind without him noticing. Almost every life-threatening encounter seemed to have left a hidden wound, and who knew if the tempering even got it all.

However, the most worrying part wasn't the sequelae, but the small marks that had been expelled right at the end. Zac barely had a chance to study them before he was returned to the repository, but he did manage to sense familiar auras from a few of them. The first, and perhaps the most worrying, definitely came from Faceless 13. The mark carried the same sinister aura as the spikes he still carried around in his Spatial Ring.

Zac couldn't imagine having a hidden mark left behind by that man a good thing, no matter if it was meant to track or slowly kill him.

The second mark was made him think of Rasuliel Tsarun for some reason. He didn't know how he had been marked by the Tsarun scion, but his eyes suddenly turned to the Spatial Ring on his finger. He had already swapped the ring he got from the Tsarun Disciple for the much superior ring he looted from the Mentalist, but perhaps he had been branded when stealing Rasuliel's ring.

That would also explain why he didn't get a mark by taking the second ring, as he wasn't actually the one who killed the mentalist or stole her ring. It was rather that squirrely thief who had tried to rob them while they both were out of commission.

The third mark, which was also the one that emitted the strongest energies, felt just like he cursed sword in his possession. He guessed that it was a hidden trap of using that accursed thing, a brand that would grow in power with every use. Nothing good could come from having that thing in his body, and he vowed to not use the sword again unless absolutely necessary.

Finally, there was one mark that was created with miasma, but Zac didn't get much more than that.

The fact that the mark was wrought from miasma severely limited the number of suspects. Be'Zi, Catheya, Adriel, and perhaps Mhal were the main ones, though Be'Zi being the source felt like a long shot. Not because Zac implicitly trusted her, but rather that he didn't feel confident that an opportunity created by the original Brazla would be able to extract something that she had planted on him. Case in point; the miasmic cage in his mind were utterly unaffected by the tempering.

Be'Zi was definitely far stronger than Brazla ever was, sitting at B-Rank cultivation at the minimum. That was a full two-stage difference, which should simply be too much to deal with for an opportunity left behind.

The last two marks Zac couldn't make heads or tails of, but that was perhaps because they were weaker than the first four. The other four marks were all far more intricate, which perhaps was what allowed Zac to recognize them. His best guess was that they were left by people in the Base Town.

In either case, it was better to have them gone than remaining, but the experience made him wonder what else was hidden in his body. Unfortunately, there was not much he could do about the situation at the moment. Most cultivators had elders to turn to, far more powerful cultivators who could blast most hidden threats by circulating their own energies through their descendants' bodies.

Zac didn't have that advantage, meaning he would have to rely on other opportunities to purge himself of hidden threats. He knew there were cleansing arrays out there, and it was perhaps about time something like that was added to his cultivation cave.

"Are you done wallowing about? I can't have trash littering my floor," the all-too-familiar voice of Brazla echoed out from above, prompting Zac to reluctantly get up on his feet with a grunt.

"Thank you," Zac said, though he didn't feel all that grateful to the Tool Spirit itself, but rather its creator. "Is there any way for me to get back to the lava pool for another round of refinement?"

Zac wasn't thinking about going there right now, but rather when reaching Peak E-Grade. He almost regretted partaking in such a good opportunity right now, as he probably would be saddled with another round of impurities by the time he was ready to form his Cultivation Core. He still remembered reading about Galvarion, the aquatic mortal who needed to spend over a century to remove all his impurities. Zac simply didn't have that kind of time.

He had made a huge splash in the Tower of Eternity, and there was also the issue of The Great Redeemer coming for revenge in a hundred years even if Zac managed to obscure Earth. Urgency pushed him forward, and his goal was to reach at least the middle stages of D-Grade before Earth got integrated for real.

At that level he should only have to worry about C-Grade Monarchs, and those kinds of people generally wouldn't come for a tiny D-Grade planet like Earth. There were only so many C-Grade cultivators in a remote sector like Zecia, and they were either in perpetual secluded cultivation or exploring the most dangerous corners of the sector in hopes of progressing their cultivation.

But cultivating with that speed would be hard even for a genius cultivator, let alone a mortal. But this lava pool might be one of the keys to speeding up the process.

"Greedy little brat. Do you think such purification is something mundane that can be used as one wanted? It was only possible thanks to the Earthen Fire seed that my master found in the bottom of that volcano, and it has a finite source of power. It had already been nurtured for tens of millions of years by the time my creator found it on an uninhabited world, and he kept purifying it for dozens of millennia as he turned the whole mountain into his forge. It was so limited that my creator couldn't even bear to use it for his own cultivation, so it was eventually left to future generations," Brazla said with a haughty voice.

"So it was something that magical?" Zac said with disappointment, though he wasn't too surprised.

Galau was the one who taught him about Pill Toxicity and how hard it was to get rid of it. If ridding your body of hidden threats was as easy as jumping into a pool of lava, then all volcanoes would have long become strategic resources of the multiverse.

“Of course, why else would the System expend so much energy to cram my master's forge into a pocket dimension left in a corner of my body?” Brazla snorted.